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Racism in the  
mental health  
system

## Shannon Murray

### A woman of Principles

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September 2010  
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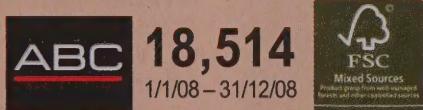
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# editorial

# When law is not enough

This year marks the anniversaries of two landmark pieces of disability legislation.

In Britain, it's 40 years since the passing of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act – usually known by the name of its sponsor, Alf (now Lord) Morris. Across the Atlantic it's 20 years since the Americans with Disabilities Act got on to the statute book.

Both events are noted in this issue. Phil Friend reflects on step changes which occurred following the passing of the Morris Act while acknowledging that much still remains to be done; in *Worldview* we've an open letter from US direct action group ADAPT, lamenting the fact that many of the benefits which have devolved to disabled Americans still have little relevance to those of their compatriots who remain incarcerated in residential institutions instead of receiving proper and appropriate support to live in the community.

Meanwhile, in his regular column, Peter White ponders whether things, in

particular, discriminatory or prejudiced attitudes, have been changed that much by the passing of anti-discrimination laws.

What's the value, for instance, of more accessible buses if disabled passengers, now more able and likely to use them, are still subject to hate-speech and abuse while travelling?

What difference does better access to shops make if disabled customers who enter them continue to be patronised or ignored by staff?

What price can we put on successive governments' commitments to bringing in new laws when they continue to fail to address the issue of the inaccessibility and inequality of the electoral system by which they came to office?

The Disability Discrimination Act cannot be dismissed out of hand, but its worth has to be questioned as long as the party which passed it into law continues to medicalise disability and not only perpetuates, but feeds the myth that too many of us are benefit scroungers.

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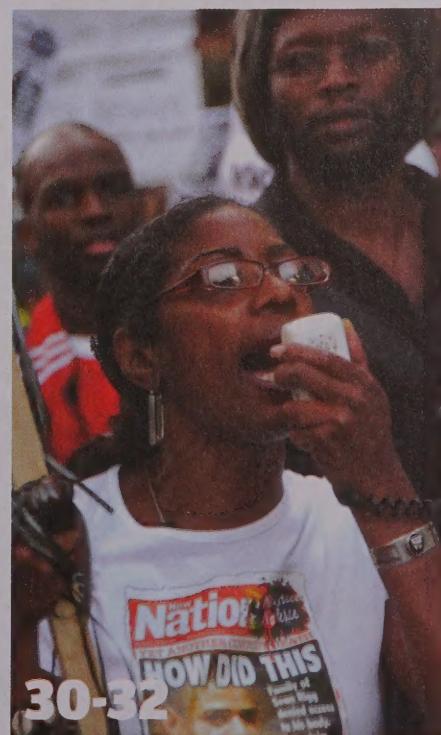
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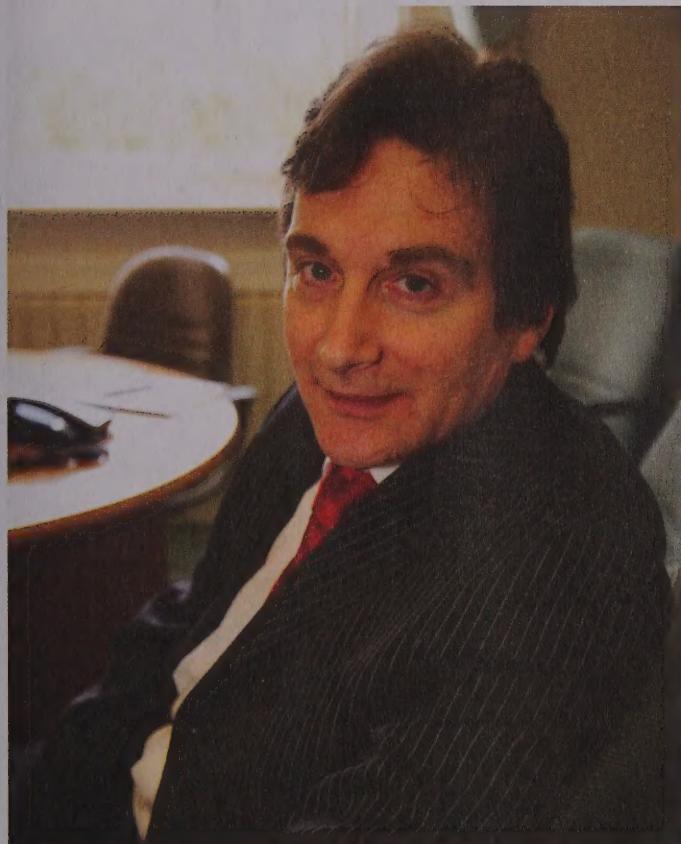
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# newsview

## Religion may not be cause of guide dog discrimination



**Sunil Peck**

Tom Pey (pictured), the Director of External Affairs at Guide Dogs, has blamed the recession for causing what he calls a "worrying" increase in cases of discrimination against owners.

He says the charity has received an increased number of enquiries from owners about problems with access to restaurants and pubs, hotels and transport. The number of complaints lodged with the charity about service providers

has also risen.

Pey believes the recession has made service providers sensitive about what they perceive to be the needs of other customers.

"In times of recession, people tend to think less about the well-being of their neighbours and more about their own survival. You'd normally expect at a time like this some sort of rise, but this is quite a significant one and it's worrying."

Although media coverage and anecdotal evidence suggests the overwhelming

number of cases of discrimination involve Muslims, Pey says it's wrong to single that community out.

"We think there's a greater acceptance of guide dogs among the Muslim population than ever. If you're Muslim and you happen to discriminate against a guide dog owner, there is sometimes a rush to equate Muslims with not liking guide dogs. But we think that in all communities there are people who act in a discriminatory way."

But how about recent press reports of guide dog owners being asked to get off buses because of the objections of Muslim drivers and passengers?

Pey says that he's only aware of one case in the last six months involving a Muslim bus driver.

"I read with interest the accounts of guide dog owners being asked by Muslim drivers to leave buses but I have to say that this is not an area that has registered on our radar."

He doesn't deny that such instances occur, but he does say that when they do, it's because the bus driver has been poorly trained rather than for cultural or religious reasons.

"The problem with the bus industry is that there's

a very high turnover of staff and keeping the training up to date is a continuous challenge for operators. That challenge cannot be an excuse for acts of discrimination, but I think it's probably lack of training that has caused the issues that have occurred."

Given that years of campaigning by Guide Dogs and owners has not eradicated discrimination among service providers, does Pey believe it's time to press for dismissal of drivers who discriminate and for shop owners and restaurateurs to lose the right to trade if they do too?

"I don't think so. Our experience is that when an act of discrimination occurs, once we approach [the perpetrator] and explain that it's against the law, then 95 per cent of the service provider's concern goes away."

"There's a hard core of repeat offenders and I believe that the full weight of the law needs to be brought against those people. In the event of repeat offending, you'll lose your taxi or minicab licence or the right to drive a bus, and there must also come a point when you shouldn't be allowed to run or own a shop."

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# newsupdate

## Covert probe shows jobs barriers for youngsters

**Paul Carter**

Many young disabled people still feel excluded from access to employment because of physical barriers and employer attitudes, a new report has claimed.

Right to Work, an investigation conducted by youth disability campaign group, Trailblazers, surveyed over 100 young disabled people, as well as carrying out undercover investigations of JobCentre Plus centres and recruitment agencies across the UK.

It found that despite being 15 years since the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act in the UK, three quarters of the young disabled people surveyed said they felt that physical access to the workplace remains a major barrier to finding a job.

The report claims that access to JobCentre Plus and recruitment agencies – places where many disabled people often take their first steps into finding work – are still lagging behind in terms of access, with computers and printers often not at an accessible height, little disabled parking, and staff that need better disability awareness training.



Tanvi Vyas, 26, a wheelchair-user from London, and one of the Trailblazers said: "I once was called to an interview for a job where the interview took place in a Job Centre. I found out afterwards from someone else who worked there that the office was inaccessible, which made me feel the time I'd put into preparing for it was wasted."

"I've been told before that I'd have to go in the goods lift to get into a building, and other Trailblazers have had the same experience. That's not an acceptable way to get to your job each day."

A spokeswoman for the Department for Work and Pensions, which is responsible for JobCentre Plus, said that it was "absolutely committed to doing all we can to help disabled people into work."

She said: "JobCentre Plus has dedicated Disability Employment Advisers who are trained to provide disabled people with the right support. Accessibility improvements have been made to JobCentre Plus premises in recent years, including the introduction of automated doors, ramps, handrails and hearing loop systems."

"Our job points were designed to be accessed by wheelchair-users and were rigorously tested at the time of introduction in 2000."

The report makes a number of recommendations for improving the employment prospects of young disabled people, including better disability awareness training for all work places, encouraging flexible hours for employees whose impairments make it difficult for them to work full time, ending the forced disclosure of impairments in job applications, and ensuring disabled employees are protected from harassment.

# newsupdate

## Northants closure sparks fears for DPOs

**Sunil Peck**

The demise of a Northamptonshire based user-led organisation is a stark reminder of the threat facing disabled people's organisations (DPOs) nationwide, campaigners have warned.

The Disabled People's Alliance Northamptonshire (DPAN) has been promoting disabled people's rights since 1993, but it's being forced to close after two other organisations won contracts for work it was previously involved with.

An advocacy contract that had been operated by Advocacy Northamptonshire, a part of the Northamptonshire Alliance, has now been taken over by Advocacy Partners Speaking Up, a national company which is not run by disabled people, while a contract to set up a centre for independent living (CIL) has been won by the user-led Bedfordshire-based Disability Resource Centre.

John Smith, co-ordinator of DPAN, told *Disability Now* that its demise was particularly worrying because of the recent demise of another user-led organisation, Ability Northamptonshire, which



All wound up: John Smith with DPAN colleagues in Northants at a recent team building day

had also been part of the bid to set up the CIL.

He said: "There's a loss of an independent disabled people's voice in the county now. It goes against the strategy to improve life chances for disabled people and what the previous and current Governments have said about promoting local user-led groups.

"Here in Northamptonshire there are now fewer user-led organisations than there were three years ago."

Smith added that the closure of DPAN meant the loss of 16 years of experience in providing an

independent voice to support disabled people, supporting people with personal budgets, running courses to develop disabled people's self-esteem and promoting the rights of people in residential care.

Stephen Lee Hodgkins, Director of Disability Lib, the Big Lottery-funded alliance of organisations that supports DPOs to develop their business skills, said that DPAN's plight reflected the fact that the situation was worsening for DPOs throughout the country.

He said: "This is contrary

to government policy, and shortsighted by the Northamptonshire authorities. While the personalisation agenda creates opportunities for growth in user-led services of disabled people, commissioning often overlooks the added value DPOs bring, as I believe to be the case for DPAN.

"Unfortunately DPOs can't sit back and think they're going to be safe as public sector cuts loom. They need to make sure that they have strategies and know who are their competitors and allies."

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## Welfare reform: time for action



With the arrival of coalition governance to Britain, we have been promised "a new politics". On welfare reform and disabled people, however, **Ruth Patrick** warns that early signs suggest the proposals for change are almost identical to those developed in opposition by the Conservatives, and there is nothing very new about the reforms

The thrust of the coalition approach to welfare reform demonstrates essential continuity with New Labour's obsession with paid work and reducing the disability benefit bill.

The Government plans to scrap all the various New Deals and associated programmes to assist people off welfare and into work, including Pathways, and replace this with a single Work Programme. Critically, all those disabled people on the work-related activity component of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) will be required to participate in the Work Programme or risk benefit sanctions. The coalition will press ahead with existing plans to migrate all Incapacity Benefit (IB) claimants onto ESA, meaning that each and every IB recipient will be required to go through the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) to determine their eligibility for ESA. It is anticipated that many existing IB claimants will be found "fit to work", and subsequently transferred over to the less generous Job



Desperate DAN: activists occupy ministry foyer

Seeker's Allowance. Disabled people and our allies should challenge and criticise these proposals, quickly and loudly, given the pace of change (the IB migration process will start this autumn).

The work-first fetishization has scope to exclude those who do not work, whilst also devaluing the unpaid work disabled people do as carers, volunteers and active service users. Critically, evidence shows the WCA is incorrectly finding many people fit for work, leading to thousands of appealed decisions every month, and creating unnecessary bureaucracy and stress for disability benefit claimants.

Surprisingly, considering the potential impact of these reforms, there is not much evidence of the disability movement and associated charities questioning the proposals. Disability Alliance is one critical voice, whilst Mind is encouraging people to write to their MPs requesting an urgent review of the WCA. For those more interested in direct action, the Disabled People's Direct Action Network (DAN) is protesting against the

reforms under a "defend welfare" tagline.

I hope there will be much more activity in the coming months, and would urge people to get involved with existing campaigns, and form new ones, to ensure that dissenting voices can be a thorn in the Government's side. In these economically straitened times, hitting the Coalition where it hurts may, in the end, prove the best way to challenge and hopefully change the status quo.

- Information on existing campaigns at:  
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# politics

## Clegg's hidden agenda conned voters

**T**here was barely a whisper about disability in the Liberal Democrats' 2010 election manifesto, other than a pledge to extend Winter Fuel Payments, now unlikely to go ahead.

But in fact, the party had very quietly declared plans to reform Disability Living Allowance (DLA) before the general election.

In a policy document, the Liberal Democrats Policy Briefing on People with Disabilities (available at [libdems.org.uk/siteFiles/resources/PDF/Policy%20Briefing%20People%20with%20Disabilities.pdf](http://libdems.org.uk/siteFiles/resources/PDF/Policy%20Briefing%20People%20with%20Disabilities.pdf)), they said: "A more detailed assessment should be available to assess the additional costs of disability benefit."

But no public announcement was made and when the party told *Disability Now* why disabled people should vote Lib Dem in the general election, they did not mention these or any plans to make changes to DLA.

Now Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg has said all parties have long championed a simpler medical test for DLA. Addressing the House of Commons on 21 July, he said: "It has been proposed



Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg's commitment to reforming Disability Living Allowance was noticeably left out from the Lib Dem manifesto, says **Anne Wollenberg**

by Members from all parties for many, many years that one way to proceed is to have a simple medical test."

Clegg added: "I meet people who say they themselves would prefer a simple medical test to know whether they continue to

be entitled to receive that benefit."

If the Lib Dems suggested it for "many years", it seems most voters never got to hear about it. When *Disability Now* called the party press office, a spokeswoman said: "People want efficiency in

the eligibility testing process. People who are being assessed want to feel like the process is efficient and straightforward. That process being more detailed doesn't mean it's less efficient or straightforward."

When asked how the process could simultaneously be more detailed but involve a simpler medical test, she said: "It's a matter of semantics."

As a DLA claimant weighing up the pros and cons of each party, I had read the briefing on disability and contacted my local Liberal Democrat candidate, Steven Toole, prior to the election. After querying where I had found the information, he assured me the Lib Dems did not plan to make it harder to access DLA.

Clegg's championing of a simpler test suggests otherwise, given previous changes to the way benefit claims are assessed have led many disabled people to believe a simpler test means one that is harder to pass.

As a result, some disabled Lib Dem voters say they feel confused and betrayed. "I did go through the manifesto before voting for them and didn't see anything that caused any alarm bells," says one DLA

claimant, who asked not to be named. "It was only when I watched the budget that I found out about their thoughts on DLA.

"When I heard Nick Clegg saying disabled people keep telling him they want a simple medical test rather than a form to fill out, I was dubious. That appears to be a misinterpretation of people's words. It appears the Government wants to listen to the views of the right-wing press who think we are all faking it."

Anne Waters, who is disabled and voted for the

## The Lib Dems have fallen behind the Tories to make this society less fair, especially to the vulnerable. I will never vote for them again

Liberal Democrats, says: "The Lib Dems have fallen behind the Tories to make this society less fair, especially to the most vulnerable. I will never vote for them again."

"The gist of the pre-election plan was about

meeting additional costs," says Liberal Democrat MP Steve Webb, the Work and Pensions Minister. "The rates of benefits don't bear any particular relationship to anything. They're just amounts. Why are they those amounts, and not higher or lower?"

Webb says these plans were not about cutting or increasing DLA. The aim was to assess the actual costs of disabled people's mobility and care needs. He says neither coalition party wants to cut spending on DLA: "Given a free hand,

neither party would be starting from here."

However, he seems to have accepted the tabloid-friendly claims that fewer people should receive it. "The idea is to prioritise DLA recipients who are most in need of the cash," he says. "What seems unlikely to me is if the numbers keep going up after years and years, is it reaching the right people? Is it achieving what it's meant to achieve?"

Somehow, it seems unlikely that a simpler medical test is really the key to finding out.

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# mediawatch

By Cathy Reay



CHANNEL 4

From legs to faces: just some of the disabled athletes who might land a career in TV presentation

## C4's 2012 talent trawl

The race is on. In an unprecedented and welcome move, Channel 4 has laid down a challenge of gargantuan proportions; a two year search for the faces of disability sport. But has the broadcaster set itself an impossible task?

**C**hannel 4 is the first television broadcaster to announce that it is taking on a big disability-related project in parallel with the Paralympic Games 2012.

The project will see the channel committing to a two-year awareness-raising pre-promotion campaign, including a £500,000 push to find and train the best disabled presenting talent.

On 29 August, exactly two years before the Games kick off, the channel screened a weekend of dedicated Paralympic programming.

It has also already begun

a nationwide search for disabled candidates to take part in presenting the sports event. The project will aim to achieve a 50 per cent ratio between disabled and non-disabled presenters.

This will be the first time the Paralympics won't be sidelined by the Olympics, as Channel 4 has promised to give as much airtime to the Paralympics as the BBC gave the Olympic Games in 2008.

It is also the first time a broadcaster has dedicated so much attention to ensure that disabled talent are the onscreen face of a large event.

The initiative sounds impressive, but will the disabled presenters whom Channel 4 picks have any realistic chance to develop a successful presenting career in the future? While Frank Gardner and Benjamin Cohen are among a small handful of presenters to have managed to break down barriers, does the project have the ability to bring more to the surface?

Mani Djazmi, sports journalist for BBC Radio 5 Live, among others, says: "It's great what they're trying to do but I think the success of it, in terms of whether disabled people

will be able to get sports presenter jobs in the future, will hinge on how talented those C4 employs are.

"With television in particular, it is still about how people look. Unfortunately based on that, a lot of disabled people are still not considered telegenic."

Benjamin Cohen, technology correspondent at *Channel 4 News*, says: "It would be silly to suggest that the promotion of a disabled person would come before the needs of the audience and their right to watch television that is understandable and engaging."

On the other hand, he adds, "I don't think any disability should be barred from being onscreen. If Channel 4 can show that audiences aren't distracted by a disability – and an engaging onscreen persona is an engaging onscreen persona – then I think they will set an example that others would be mad not to follow."

Alison Walsh, director of disability programming at Channel 4, says she is very confident that the channel will find talent that can go on to find success in the longer term.

"The fact is that talent does speak. If we get the best people we can and give them the best training and support we can, so long

as they do a good job and have credibility, people should be able to see that. And why shouldn't they go on to great careers afterwards?"

The programmes that featured over the August bank holiday weekend included *Inside Incredible Athletes*, a documentary profiling athletes hoping to compete in the 2012 games, and the magazine series *That Paralympics Show*, presented by Paralympian Ade Adepitan and Rock Edwards of Channel 4's teen zone T4.

*Inside Incredible Athletes* was heavily marketed in a campaign (perhaps controversially) titled "Freaks Of Nature", with adverts syndicated through national newspapers and Channel 4-owned TV stations.

Adepitan, next month's *Disability Now* cover star, says: "I think it's a landmark moment, I think it's a moment we'll all look back on in 20 or 30 years and say this is the moment where the Paralympics really came of age. There's going to be 150 hours of coverage. It's something that people

almost can't believe. It can't do anything but good for the Paralympics to have that much exposure."

Walsh adds: "We want to build household names of the athletes. Sadly at the moment, most people couldn't name even one disabled athlete taking part. We want to change that."

With Channel 4's track record in bringing disability to the mainstream (*Cast*

*Offs, Hollyoaks*) and making cricket "cool", it looks as if disability sport could be in for an explosive rejuvenation.

To keep up to date with Channel 4's progress in its search for disabled sports presenters, and for more information on its Paralympics programmes, visit [channel4.com/paralympics](http://channel4.com/paralympics) or follow @C4Paralympics on Twitter

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# disability rights

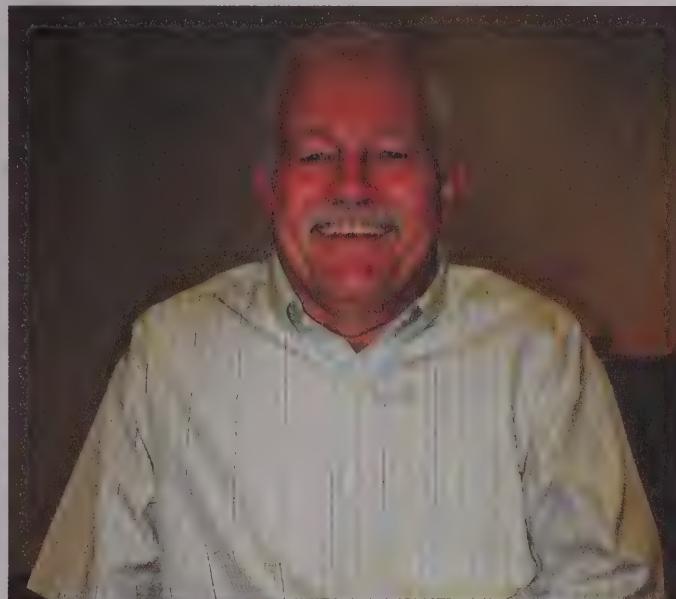
## Friend on friends and allies

Chair of RADAR and long-time disabled activist Phil Friend reflects on the 40-year fight for rights following the passing of a seminal act

In 1970, I was becoming interested in disability from a political point of view. The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act put disability rights on the political map. It was the first piece of legislation I remember which recognised that disabled people should be treated fairly and equally.

Its impact was gradual but one thing that I remember very clearly was the emergence of the young disabled units (YDUs). Before the Act, severely disabled people with impairments like multiple sclerosis and spinal cord lesions could find themselves living in geriatric wards filled with very old people who had Alzheimer's. But when the act was passed younger disabled people were moved out of these wards, which meant that they had more independence and could go out and could lead slightly more normal lives. I remember the YDU being built in Hillingdon. It was in the grounds of the hospital, not outside in the community, but at least it wasn't on a ward.

The other major change I recall was that the Act brought in some protection in terms of the accessibility of



JAMIE TROUNCE

**FOREVER FRIENDS:** Phil Friend, and Lords Morris and Ashley



universities. Although there were lots of get-out clauses which meant that institutions could avoid making buildings more accessible, it was the first time I remember people talking about disabled students and disabled people having the right to

go to university.

An example of the usual level of disabled people's expectations, particularly those in special schools, before the Act is that when I left school in 1961, I left with a guy called George. He said that he was going

to sign on. He said "I'm going to save all my benefit money and I'll buy a gold watch". He was 16 and had a slight weakness on one side of his body, which by today's standards is not really severely disabled at all. But he'd already retired. He wasn't that unusual. Many disabled people in the '60s and '70s were "grateful" for the benefits they got and being looked after by society.

Another legacy of the Act, which had already brought about improved civil rights, is that Alf Morris with Jack Ashley began to develop strong alliances with groups of disabled and non-disabled people which was quite novel then. Groups like the Spastic Society (now Scope) and RADAR began to see that there was real mileage in forming strategic alliances with politicians who could deliver bills that would increase opportunities for disabled people. As a result campaigning groups run by disabled people began to flourish.

Despite all this, there still remains the sense that we should be grateful for what we've got: we are still not being given the support we need to ensure that we have the opportunity to enjoy the life chances that non-disabled people expect.

- Phil Friend was talking to Sunil Peck

# worldview



PETE SOUZA - WHITE HOUSE VIA CNP/REX FEATURES

## Let our people go

To mark the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act, US activist organisation ADAPT sends out a message to remind the community that too many of their fellow disabled Americans remain locked away in institutions

**A**s the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) draws near, we approach the milestone with mixed emotions.

Securing national civil

rights legislation, protecting the rights of people with disabilities, was truly historic. It is important that we recognise the incredible nature of this accomplishment and the hard work of those that made this happen, but 20

years after President George H. W. Bush signed this civil rights legislation into law and as our community is preparing for the celebrations, we pause in disappointment that the promise of freedom has still not reached our sisters and

brothers in nursing facilities and other institutions.

They remain locked away, unseen and unheard. For them, the Act is just words on paper. They are not given the opportunity to exercise their civil rights under this law because they

still do not have the basic freedoms that other Americans enjoy.

They may hear about the progress our community has made over the past 20 years, but knowing that you are protected against discrimination in employment means nothing when the hub of your life is a bedroom you share with a stranger. Knowing that buildings and public accommodations are accessible means nothing when the facility staff won't let you leave; and even having access to lifts on buses – as dear to our hearts as that is – means nothing when you cannot afford to go anywhere on the allowance that is left over after the institution has taken its share of your money.

When we gather together as a community, we must remember that those in institutions will not be toasting those that authored or advocated for the Act. They will not be celebrating independent living, either as a movement or personal achievement, and they certainly won't share in the power or pride of the disability community. For them, July 26th will have been the same as every other day in the institution.

Recently, ADAPT has been criticised by some of the provider-based

advocates in our community. They tell us that we should be grateful for the efforts that have been made so far, and that we must be patient because change takes time.

### **Knowing that you are protected against discrimination in employment means nothing when the hub of your life is a bedroom you share with a stranger**

We will not apologise for our impatience. We do this because our brothers and sisters have waited long enough for their freedom. We cannot sit by, patiently and quietly waiting for our government to give our people the freedom which should be their birthright.

When President Obama was taking the oath of office with his hand on Lincoln's bible, it seemed like fate was telling us that he would free our people. We hoped that this historic anniversary in the disability community would be celebrated with historic change.

While we recognise that some gains were made, unlike any other class of Americans, our freedom remains a state option.

We have seen, during the

last 20 years, that new administrations have their own priorities, and we also know that the gains we may make in the courts are hard-fought, slow, and constantly subject to attack. Even right now, as many in the disability community commemorate the ADA's anniversary, the Attorney General in Connecticut is coordinating legal efforts by the states to fight against some of the recent gains we have made in court which will allow more of our people to live in freedom.

In America, freedom shouldn't ever be optional, but – in fact – for us it is.

While federal Medicaid rules require states to pay for institutional placement, community-based alternatives are state options and continually subject to elimination in state budget cuts. It is ironic that as we celebrate a civil rights victory that is 20 years old, our freedom is becoming even more precarious and the situation becoming more dire. States, facing record budget shortfalls, are cutting the services that support community living options for seniors and persons with disabilities. These budget cuts force people into unwanted placement, stealing from them much of what is most precious: their homes, their families and

their freedom.

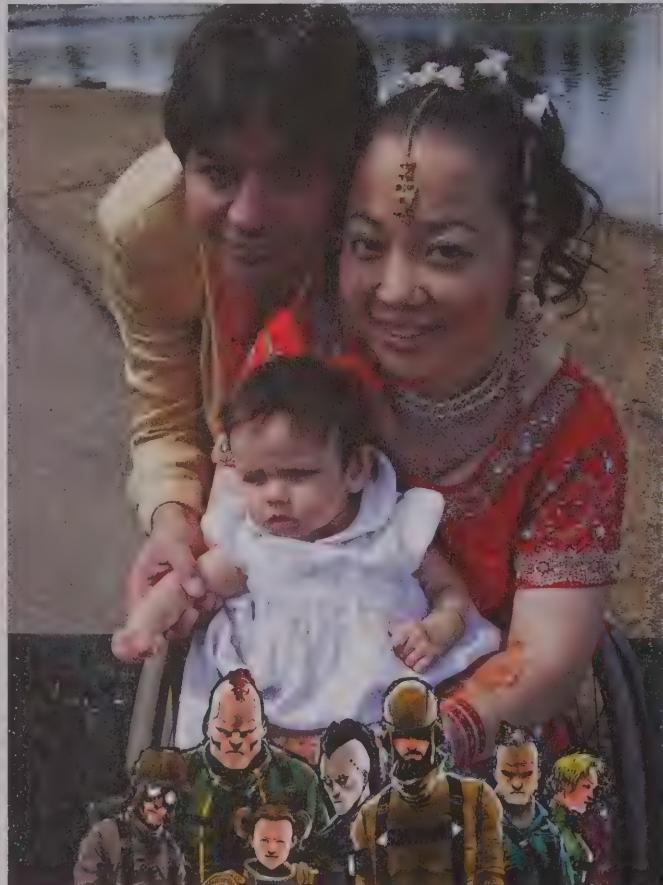
Some people have moved across the country to a different state to get supports and services to live outside of the institution.

There, they have been able to share in the promise of the ADA, but many people don't know about the services available in other states or simply might not be able to make the journey on this modern underground railroad.

But as long as community services are only an option, those who have escaped to freedom cannot escape the fear. No place is safe because their freedom can easily disappear at the whim of state policy makers. They will be called upon to help solve their state's budget crisis by sacrificing their freedom, home and lives.

We all need to recognise that through personal circumstance or state policy change any of us can lose our freedom. No one in our community is exempt. No one is safe. No one in our community can afford to be comfortable, but it is also our hope that – from this discomfort – the disability community will be mobilised to take action and, together, we will build on a 20-year legacy to address this injustice. Our movement isn't about the civil rights for some of us; it is about the freedom of all of us.

# one2watch



## Comic book heroine

Canadian graphic artist, Kuen Tang has many firsts under her belt: first quadriplegic woman to qualify as an elementary school teacher; first to try Functional Electrical Stimulation partnership rowing in North America; the only woman on Alberta's "Murderball" team. And on the eighth anniversary of the accident that made her disabled she became the first quadriplegic to letter comics for DC Comics. Now she's the first Canadian to answer our ten questions.

### What's the best thing about being disabled?

My newly enhanced ability to notice all the broken elevators, unnecessary steps, ultra-steep ramps, and overly-narrow doorways.

### What funny things get said about your impairment?

Sometimes people ask me to simply "get up for just one second"

### What makes you angry?

People parking right beside my van (where the ramp comes out) no matter how I park or what sign I place near my van to deter people from parking close.

### If you were Prime Minister, what would you do to improve things for disabled people?

I would make Universal Design the standard for all building codes and all forms of communication (i.e. print, web, etc).

### What invention could make your life better?

A wheelchair with Dr. Octopus arms.

### What do you like most about creating comic strips?

I love the control. I can live my ideal life in a comic or I can use it to make a point or educate others through laughter. Check out my web comic at: [zudacomics.com/absolute\\_magnitude](http://zudacomics.com/absolute_magnitude)

### What do you like least about it?

Waiting. I am the letterer, so I am the last person in our creative team to get the script and the completed art pages.

### Who's your favourite disabled person ever?

Rick Hansen. He has the "can do" attitude which I admire and strive to achieve.

### Do you have any special or hidden talents?

Many! I paint, draw, fold origami, learn more than one language at a time, multi-task, and turn wood. There isn't anything I can't do: I just need time to figure out how.

### Can you sum yourself up in ten words or less?

Don't let my disability scare you, let my ability impress you! (Sorry, that's 11 words.)

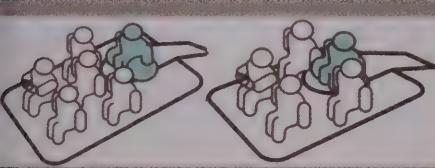
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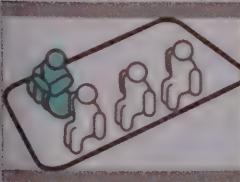
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# shannon murray model and more

Actress, model, rights activist, would-be legal eagle and the face of Debenhams' fashion. The phrase "woman of many parts" might have been made to measure for Shannon Murray who shares her ambition and enthusiasm with **Cathy Reay**

**S**ome people walk straight out of university into the job of their dreams. Some are spotted by an eagle eye on the street. Some just "know the right people". But for the majority of us it can take years to find what we are really looking for, and that's no different for this month's *Disability Now* cover star Shannon Murray. She smiles: "It's been a very, very slow snowball; it hasn't been an avalanche!"

But after a stint on Channel 4's *How To Look Good Naked* turned into an opportunity to model for a major clothes retailer, it looks like Shannon's career may be turning a corner.

I meet the gorgeous thirty-something in Soho on one of her rare days off from moving house, working full-time in business, filling in law firm application forms and, you know, appearing on billboards in sexy lingerie.

"Last December *How To Look Good Naked* (HTLGN) promoted the programme by putting pictures of me



JAMIE TROWNCE

on either side of a London bus for a day and in one I wore lingerie. Because it was winter I was bundled up in clothes but I felt so naked looking at it!" Shannon flashes a huge grin that makes it nigh on impossible to believe she's embarrassed by anything.

Despite her initial nervousness, she

says that when the HTLGN producers asked her to join their campaign to get major retailers to use disabled models in their advertising, she jumped at the chance. "They had this great idea that they would take photos of disabled women to retail executives, show them that we can look just as good as non-disabled models and ask why we aren't being used."

It so happened that at the same time Debenhams was about to relaunch its Principles range, with the concept that it worked for every woman of every size and shape. They booked Shannon for a shoot and now she gets to bask in the glory of being the first disabled model to feature in a major retailer's shop window.

"I've met disabled women who are so unconfident and unsure of how they can look great, so I was really pleased Gok Wan and the team treated it, and me, like anyone else on the programme," she says.

"After I became disabled I didn't





COURTESY OF DEBENHAMS

think for a minute that 20 years from then something like this would be happening."

In fact 20 years ago Shannon thought her childhood dreams of becoming a successful actress were completely shattered. Aged 14 on summer holiday with her family she fell and broke her neck, leaving her paraplegic, unable to walk unaided.

Shannon recounts her year-long rehabilitation process: "In hospital I watched lots of TV, and all I could think about was how there was this

huge lack of disabled people on anything except the Paralympics. I really began to believe that acting was out the window."

But she says a small part of her hungered to be the one to break down those barriers. Raised in London by hugely successful music industry-bred parents (her dad was a tour manager and her mother created clothes for assorted A-list popstars), it is safe to assume her determination can be traced back to her upbringing.

"My attitude comes from my parents.

**I watched lots of TV, and all I could think about was how there was this huge lack of disabled people on anything except the Paralympics**

If someone tells me something isn't possible then my brain just thinks ok, how do I get round this?"

But after spending her childhood years behind the scenes Shannon felt disillusioned by the music business, so at seven-years-old she enrolled into drama school, spending her free time in her room acting out made-up stories with her Cabbage Patch dolls. "I performed in my own little world, I was such a drama queen!", she recounts.

It wasn't until much later, in a sixth form common room, a friend persuaded her to enter a disabled modelling competition advertised in *The Sun*. "I just remember that I kept getting the callbacks and then I won and suddenly I had an agent too," she says. "Things started to change; Model in a Million came with its own media circus. I was getting interviews and sure enough the offers for TV work slowly trickled in too."

Though Shannon felt uncomfortable that the opportunities offered to her were all in programmes specifically to



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do with disability: "I'd get offers from Sunday morning disability programmes and I began to wonder why I should be relegated, it was frustrating."

But it wasn't all doom and gloom. Shannon secured the lead in Stephen Poliakoff's BBC drama *Friends and Crocodiles*, a guest spot on *Casualty* and a role in the rather dubiously titled (nevertheless great) *Planet Arse* for Channel 4. It was these she loved the most: "You do things like *Casualty* and you love it and then when you're finished you just want to be back there. I loved the sets, the people; I wanted to be there every day."

Simultaneously Shannon was picked up for modelling work for disability spreads in *Just 17*, *French Elle*, *News of the World* and, strangely, the Spice Girls fan club magazine. As a consequence she spent her late teens flitting between jobs while also trying to study a law degree.

"There were quiet periods and times when it was busy so I knew I'd need a back up plan, which is why I followed law. I didn't want to get to 50 and say 'I've spent 30 years waiting for a great acting role'. I didn't want to look back and know I spent my whole life wishing for something that didn't happen," she says. "You've got to make things happen, so it was at that point I was thinking ok, what shall I do next?"

Two years later, worked to the bone and partied out, Shannon contracted pneumonia and was forced to leave university and her frantic student life in Manchester behind. After recovery she got a job at the jewellers Tiffanys and ended up staying put: "I really enjoyed having a job, earning money, I actually stayed there nearly five years before I kicked myself into gear and went back to education."

Shannon re-studied law at Westminster, graduated in 2006, and



followed it with two years at weekend Law School. So, after seven years of studying the subject, does she feel like giving up everything to travel that path?

"The way I see it is if the TV thing works out then great, but if not then a career as a lawyer beckons. Sometimes I think I might even be happier as a lawyer! As I learnt through Debenhams and through what actor friends have told me, being on TV comes with its

**You do things like *Casualty* and you love it and then when you're finished you just want to be back there. I loved the sets, the people; I wanted to be there every day**

own issues, with people thinking they have a right to say what they want about you because you're in the public eye. The pressures of making sure you look and sound good are always there."

While she's been busy shaping her alternative career route, things have changed radically for disabled people in the media. The big change is simply that there is a hell of a lot more of them on the telly. Shannon agrees: "The more you see other people onscreen the more you know we're

kicking the door down and that fills me with hope for the future.

"I love presenting, I love drama; Cerrie Burnell, a couple of other talented disabled women and I were talking recently about how we should launch our own version of *Loose Women*. It would be hysterical!"

The world might not be quite ready for that, but Shannon isn't waiting around. Whatever path she ends up choosing, she's got big goals ahead:

"Life is there and you can't sit back and let it pass you by. Yeah there are obstacles, the environment isn't easy for someone in a wheelchair or crutches or whatever, but if you're up for the challenge then just, you know, do it!"

Model, actress, designer, lawyer or human rights activist: whatever her guise, you'll soon be hearing a lot more from Shannon Murray. ■

• *How To Look Good Naked* featuring Shannon Murray will premiere on Channel 4 on Wednesday 1st September at 8.30pm or you can watch it after that date at [channel4.com/4od](http://channel4.com/4od)

• Shannon will be participating in the Disabled & Sexy catwalk fashion show to raise money for the Jennifer Trust for Spinal Muscular Atrophy at the Tabernacle, Notting Hill in London on 25 October. Visit [disabledandsexy.co.uk](http://disabledandsexy.co.uk) for more information.



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Sisters, Samantha Rigg-David (above) and Marcia Rigg-Samuel (right) campaign for justice for their brother Sean Rigg who died in police custody

Following five years of delivery of a race equality initiative in the mental health system, do black service-users feel any more confident in the system? **Kelly Mullan** investigates



# Breaking the circle

## Racism and mental health

It's a plain fact. Black and minority ethnic (BME) people in need of mental health care experience worse outcomes than white people. The previous Government spent 20 million per year from 2005 to 2010 on the Delivering Race Equality programme

(DRE) but according to the human rights campaigning group Black Mental Health UK (BMH UK): "Detention rates of black people under the Mental Health Act are at an all time historic high despite having the same rates of mental illness as other ethnic groups."

Using data from the DRE's Count Me In Census, BMH UK claim that African Caribbeans are 44 per cent more likely to be sectioned, 50 per cent more likely to be placed in seclusion, 29 per cent more likely to be forcibly restrained and make up 30 per cent of inpatients on

medium secure wards.

Activist Julie Jaye Charles, founder of the Equalities National Council, says: "I had to fight for services in a predominantly white area. Why? It's simple. It's racism. Years ago racism was people calling you a nigger, calling you a black whatever, but since the Race Equality Act and the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry it's more underhand, but it then explodes in individuals."

"BME men in the mental health system are very often seen as aggressive. BME males are more often arrested than their white counterparts and they're more often put into the criminal justice parts of the mental health system."

Patricia Chambers (*pictured above*) is a service-user working to support other service-users in a work and recovery programme in London. She says: "When I go out to the wards and visit people quite often it's 100 per cent black including the staff. That's the same for male and female. That kind of thing is evidence in your face of institutional racism in mental health. And there are quite a few documents and papers out there that will give you the reality of racism in the system, like *Circles of Fear* done by the Sainsbury Centre."

The phrase "circles of fear" neatly describes the relationship between BME communities and mental health services. Inherent racist beliefs that black people are more likely to be violent mean psychiatrists and nurses fear black people and consequently they are more likely to be overmedicated or restrained. This means black communities are apprehensive about seeking support and mental health problems can spiral into crisis, making the police more likely to get involved.

Ambrose Koryang from Cope Black Mental Health in Birmingham says: "Yes there is institutional racism. I trained as a psychiatric nurse and I've



witnessed it first-hand, being informed by my assessor that Mr X needs this high dose of medication as he can be dangerous and erratic, whereas when Mr Y comes in with similar symptoms he will be talked to and engaged with before being medicated. Black patients would be initially medicated before anyone talked with them and then it was quite pointless because under the influence of medication they couldn't communicate effectively.

**“It’s simple. It’s racism. Years ago racism was people calling you a nigger, calling you a black whatever, but since the Race Equality Act and the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry it’s more underhand”**

"Individuals from African Caribbean backgrounds tend to have a lack of trust in mental health services, based on stories they have heard or based on knowing family members or friends who have used services to their detriment. All this exacerbates illness so there is no intervention until a crisis point and people end up in hospital."

Marcel Vige from Diverse Minds says: "There's a self-fulfilling prophecy: if particular groups of people come to services late then there is a greater likelihood that you

will see them in crisis, so psychiatrists will believe that certain groups will be more prone to acting dangerously. Broader preconceptions about the dangerousness of certain groups are reinforced. You can see the logic of using medication as a quick, effective way of managing behaviour.

"That raises the question of managing/containing or therapy and which takes precedence? If you only see people when they are in crisis or if you don't have experience of dealing with people from a particular cultural group then you can misinterpret and misdiagnose. Users might not feel supported and that leads to frustration. When you think of all these different factors coming together, well then medication can seem like the most sensible short-term option. One things leads to another: there's a knock-on effect."

Paul Grey has written a book, *Change Starts from Within*, about his experiences of the mental health system and says: "You have to define what 'institutional racism' means. When you go into the system you go there for help and hope, not to analyze racism. So what is it? [Sir William] Macpherson [who headed the Stephen Lawrence enquiry] says it's 'collective behaviour that unwittingly leads to poorer outcomes for certain groups'. The mental health system isn't evil but there's a collective failure in training and operational management. There are unwitting attitudes and behaviours. If all that you hear about one group is negativity then that filters through into ideas and theories and philosophies and into training and operational management."

"Often my first point of contact with services was through the police. I'd be running down the road or doing some crazy thing and the police would come out. They'd cuff me and take me to a

police cell and I'd spend hours there before going to hospital and being assessed and then being taken to another unit and being assessed there. It was a laborious process."

Matilda MacAttram of BMH UK says: "The use of police cells as places of safety is routine. We have high profile cases of deaths in custody to show that a police station is not a place of safety for people who need mental health care. We are calling for an end to the use of police cells as 'places of safety'."

As *Disability Now* goes to press, campaigners are planning to mark the two-year anniversary of the unexplained death in custody of Sean Rigg (*pictured below*), a physically fit and healthy 39-year-old with schizophrenia, at Brixton Police Station. On 21 August 2008 Sean Rigg was arrested on suspicion of a public order offence and restrained in the back of a police van. He died 91 minutes after being taken into police custody and his family has yet to receive an explanation of what happened.

Marcel Vige says "The question to ask isn't 'is there institutional racism?' but given that it's present, how can we counteract it?"

"The Delivering Race Equality



programme was introduced in 2005 in response to the report into the death of David Bennett," says Matilda MacAttram. "Over five years and with £20 million being committed year on year, not one single objective has been met. Access to psychological therapy hasn't happened. Reducing detention rates hasn't happened. Overmedication, forcible restraint and the death rate have got worse."

**“Often my first point of contact with services was through the police. I'd be running down the road or doing some crazy thing and the police would come out. They'd cuff me and take me to a police cell”**

DRE's key aims were to reduce rates of admission, detention and seclusion among black and minority ethnic groups. The annual Count Me In Censuses show these goals have not been achieved.

Matilda MacAttram says: "We know that community-based services work. If there was a commitment to address the problem, that's where spending would have gone. Instead I've seen at least ten community-based services close their doors because of lack of funding. We don't know where that £100 million went but it didn't go to the people that needed it."

Julie Jaye Charles (*pictured above*) was involved in DRE and set up The Ambassadors Programme to engage the skills of service-users in making change. "I saw DRE as a chance to take a holistic approach to mental health with a social model of disability

approach but money wasn't spent in the right places. Disability in the social model is about how society treats us but the social model didn't really come into the DRE programme at all. It was very medical, very health. I had to fight for about three years to get ideas like 'independent living', 'personalisation' and 'social model' heard.

"I think that if independent living had been part of the agenda from the beginning there would have been more linkage with other public sector departments like housing, employment and education.

"Psychiatric input is important but so is having a roof over your head, so is getting into employment, so is getting into education. Psychiatry helps, therapy helps, but then where do they go when they walk out of that building? What happens to them? I think a focus is needed on independent living as a whole."

Marcel Vige from Diverse Minds says: "If you look at the grassroots work and the community development work, DRE has been useful in a lot of localities. Where it failed is that there hasn't been consistency. There are pockets of good practice but no co-ordination to make them all pull in the same direction."

Paul Grey says: "A five year programme was never going to solve problems that have been around for decades, but we have the best national health service in the world and we need to invest in it. If we value staff maybe they will value the people they work with."

Given the cost-cutting agenda of the coalition Government, the financial arguments for effective community services might win where humanitarian arguments have been ignored. BMH UK is waiting to meet with health ministers to put their case. ■

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# yourviews

## No walls in China



The fact that Cathy Reay didn't see disabled people while on holiday in China and experienced problems finding suitable toilets ("Chinese Takeaway" *Disability Now*, August 2010) may have been because she went to areas that weren't frequented by tourists.

My company took a small group holiday for disabled people to China in October 2009, including seven people in wheelchairs, and we stayed in both Beijing and Xian. All transport, hotel rooms, restaurants and venues were pre-researched for accessibility.

We went to a rehab centre for the disabled and inter-

acted with them as well as seeing many of the major attractions, including the Great Wall, Tiananmen Square and the Terracotta Warriors, among others. We found all the attractions could be accessed by wheelchair, with ramps or lifts and accessible toilets.

There were Western-style toilets in all facilities as well as squat toilets, and we saw lots of disabled people in the cities, walking with crutches or in three-wheeled motorized scooters, going about their daily business. Indeed, on occasion, we had to decline help from the Chinese who tried to assist us.

**Jean Burdett, by email**

## TV doesn't get it - and nor do we

I wish to set the record straight about profound deafness being portrayed as a non-disability.

The four-part BBC drama *The Silence* (12–15 July) featured a deaf girl, Amelia, who was told by her policeman uncle: "Amelia, you're only deaf, not disabled."

I find such remarks, unchallenged, irresponsible and disrespectful to all those going through the trials and tribulations of invisible and stressful sensory loss.

People with acquired deafness and many hard-of-hearing people have to

adjust from a world of hearing to learning sign language and lip-reading.

All TV networks need to ensure they don't mislead or undermine those making the best of things under a disability.

**Jimmy Craw**

I was pleased to see BBC2's programme called *Are You Having a Laugh?* (25 June) showing just how much attitudes towards Deaf and disabled people have changed for the better on the small screen over the past 30 years or so. It also

showed how competent all the individuals featured on the programme were at presenting themselves on the box.

The comedian Laurence Clark made an important point when he said that although there has been increasing representation of Deaf and disabled people in soaps, to reflect the demographics of society more realistically, soaps should have four or five Deaf/disabled people in each one!

So why hasn't the BBC implemented that ratio in

its use of presenters? At this moment it employs only five disabled presenters (excluding the specialist programme *See Hear*) out of 20,000 staff! I've been badgering Sir Michael Lyons, the BBC's chair, for the past 15 months to increase the number of Deaf and disabled presenters on BBC programmes, to no effect. Talk about paying to be insulted: I think it's time I refused to pay my licence fee.

BBC, you're a disgrace. You'll show us but won't employ us! Anybody agree? **Roger Cliffe-Thompson, by email**

# Call for level floors in pubs gets flat response

Sunil Peck's article on Scotland's amendment to its licensing laws ("Scots toast new pub access law", *Disability Now*, August 2010) ends by pointing out that without a similar change in the law south of the border, disabled people in England and Wales will have to stick to the accessible pub they're used to. I hope English and Welsh people aren't so complacent.

Part 3 of the Disability Discrimination Act, which deals with access to goods and services, has been out since 1999. The deadline (ha!) for sorting out access problems was five years later. And we're still waiting.

The fault is ours. Unless we challenge inaccessible pubs, shops and hotels to do something about their lack of reasonable access, nothing will change.

**Jonathan Toye,  
West Norfolk Disability  
information Service  
(WNDiS), King's Lynn**

As a wheelchair-user who visits towns and cities all over England, I'm always frustrated by the lack of information provided by restaurants and bars about access to their premises.

This isn't a gripe about the lack of access, but about the failure to provide adequate



CAPABILITY SCOTLAND 2010

advice on the outside of buildings, especially when institutions may have gone to great lengths in fitting, say, accessible toilets.

I've been working on an online pubs and restaurant guide called Open Door Shropshire for Shropshire Council, which has meant talking to businesses about this problem. It's quite interesting that when you ask them why they've gone to so much effort, for example, making the venue accessible from the rear without advertising the fact on the front, the usual response is that they hadn't realised they needed to. I've often had to encourage them to put a plaque on the street front, pointing out,

say, that there's rear access for disabled users.

Tourist centres may hold this information but aren't often open in the evening, and most people aren't so organised as to plan their eating in advance.

I developed Open Door Shropshire after finding that access information provided in the restaurant reviews in our local paper was invariably wrong. Two of my favourite pubs in Shrewsbury, for example, were said to be inaccessible because of the age of the buildings and the steps at

the front when both are completely accessible, and with accessible facilities.

Do readers know if there has been any national effort to force restaurants to give access information on the menus they display outside their premises? The sort of information we need is whether there is level access, accessible or ground floor toilets, large-print menus etc. If food and drink outlets adopted this simple approach, it would save me and others a lot of expensive time.

**Anne Johnson, by email**

## → Have your say

- write to us **Disability Now**, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW
- email us [editor@disabilitynow.org.uk](mailto:editor@disabilitynow.org.uk)



# mike oliver

# Government cuts: the call to action

Spending cuts of the 1980s had the result of mobilising activists, says **Mike Oliver**. And now, with cuts once more on the agenda, it's time again to act

**T**he recent Government announcements about cutting public expenditure have a familiar ring to them. In 1979 when Margaret Thatcher came to power she said the same thing. In fact she went even further and made it clear that disabled people would have to take their share of the pain that this would cause. The current Government have been more coded in their message to disabled people but it is clear from their plans for incapacity benefit and disability living allowance that we can expect the same.

Thatcher's message all those years ago may have been unequivocal but its effect was to give added stimulus to the emerging disabled people's movement because now we had a cause to defend as well as an agenda to promote. The big disability charities at this time were still locked into the "disability as tragedy" mindset and were anxious not to upset an aggressive government or put their

**Thatcher's message all those years ago may have been unequivocal but its effect was to give added stimulus to the emerging disabled people's movement because now we had a cause to defend as well as an agenda to promote**

partnership with it at risk.

Despite this, by the end of the 1980s the disabled people's movement had managed to develop and promote the social model of disability as well as putting independent living and disability rights firmly on the political agenda. By the time the Conservative Government left office in 1997 the legislative framework to support all this was securely in place. In reality those 17 years had seen increasing improvements in the

standard of living for disabled people and expanding lifestyle choices.

While the Government agenda now may be the same as then, not all else is. The disabled people's movement is not the energetic and powerful force it once was. Some of its leaders are, sadly, no longer with us. Others have decided to do their "fighting" from the inside of Government. And still others no longer have the energy and commitment to put into the movement.

On the other hand, the big disability charities have managed to re-invent themselves as representative organisations and re-position themselves as government allies as they go about promoting disability rights and independent living agendas. Now these agendas are going to run into funding difficulties,

partnership may not be the best way of defending them.

If the current Government succeeds in cutting public expenditure, conflict rather than co-operation is likely to be at the heart of relations between the Government and disabled people over the next decade. Will the newer generations of disabled people continue just to enjoy the fruits of the previous generation's labour or will they breathe new heart and life into the ailing disabled people's movement? Will the disability charities be prepared to take to the streets to defend the agendas they are currently promoting, even if it costs their trustees a gong or two and their senior managers career enhancement?

Forgive the ambulist metaphor but we may all soon need to stand up and be counted.

## → Have your say

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**DAVID CLARKE**

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Occupational therapist with interest in housing

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## Am I eligible for assistance?

**Q** How can I find out if I'm entitled to personal assistance? I have polio, I'm on higher rate DLA, have two children and live in Tower Hamlets in east London.

**Farah Esse, by phone**



**Agnes Fletcher suggests:** You need to start by asking for a

home assessment to determine whether, according to their criteria, you need help with daily living tasks. Like all councils, Tower Hamlets has to use a document called *Prioritising need in the context of Putting People First: a whole system approach to eligibility for social care – guidance on eligibility criteria for adult*

*social care, England, 2010* ([dh.gov.uk/en/PublicationsAndStatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_113154](http://dh.gov.uk/en/PublicationsAndStatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_113154)). This replaces the *Fair Access to Care* rules (though these are still listed on the Tower Hamlets website). Start by getting in touch with the Social Care Team, Tel: 020 7364 5005. Email: [adultcare@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:adultcare@towerhamlets.gov.uk).

## How do DLA and AA differ?

**Q** I'm confused about the difference between Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Attendance Allowance (AA).

I'm currently in receipt of DLA and approaching 65, but I understand that after that age people are no longer entitled to DLA.

My question is, can one

be eligible to claim DLA after the age of 65?

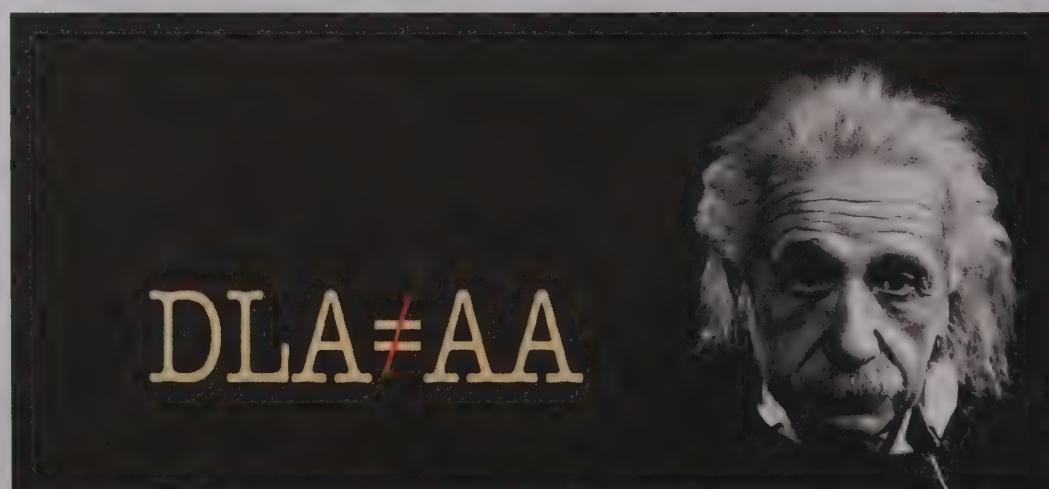
In addition, will I, as a current recipient continue receiving DLA after my 65th birthday? And under what circumstances would I or anyone else apply for or transfer to Attendance Allowance?

**A Hunter, North London**



**Ken Butler of the Disability Alliance says:**

If you receive DLA before your 65th birthday then you continue to receive it after your birthday. You cannot make a new claim for DLA after your 65th birthday. Attendance Allowance is the DLA equivalent for people 65 years or over at the point of making a claim.



# Can council do U-turn on planning permission?

**Q** We live in a fourth-floor council flat and to make it easier to get up there, we recently installed a lift (pictured, right) to aid my wife's mother, who is a wheelchair-user, and my wife, who is pregnant and has a two-year-old.

Initially the council told us we didn't need planning permission. Now that we've installed it, they've changed their mind and say that they want us to remove it.

I was wondering if you had any possible advice to give us. It's a state-of-the-art lift. It makes the property sustainable for the future and accessible for all, but the council feels the lift doesn't fit in with the building. Any help would be appreciated.  
**Ian Garlick, by email**



**Kate Sheehan replies:** This is a little more complicated than it first appears. If the lift had been internal to your property, there should have been no need for the Council to be involved, unless it's a listed building. But since the lift has been installed externally and has a visual impact on the front of the property, it will



indeed have required planning permission and building control approval.

The first query I would make was who originally advised you that planning permission was not needed, and did you get this advice in writing, as this would be their mistake and they must at the least bear the costs of the lift, its installation and now its removal if the council recommends this.

If you don't have the above, I'd ask why they have turned it down on the retrospective planning application. If it's on grounds of safety, I suggest you seek advice from the lift installers to see if alterations can be made to make it compliant. If it's on visual or environmental

grounds, I suggest you appeal to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government via the local authority complaints system. This does take time and cost money but it will mean that an independent person will review your application. It will also give you a brief opportunity to make your own verbal statement when the assessment visit is carried out.

I'm also concerned that the company that installed the lift didn't question your belief that you didn't need planning permission, as

they should know from experience that that advice was wrong.

I also recommend that you contact the lift installers to inform them of the situation and say that in your opinion they had a professional duty to question the lack of need for planning permission.

If the planning appeal is not successful, you might negotiate with the lift company some financial compensation, but if you follow this course of action I recommend you seek legal advice first.

## → If you have a question for our panel

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# Sussex Health Care

Sussex Health Care is an award winning group of care homes that were founded in 1985.

Sussex Health Care now operates 16 care homes, predominantly in the West Sussex area, providing nearly 550 beds, incorporating specialist care provision including care for older people.

## Orchard Lodge, Dorking Road, Warnham, West Sussex RH12 3RZ

Orchard Lodge, just outside Horsham, West Sussex, provides care for adults with learning and physical disabilities. This specialist care home with nursing combines the latest technological facilities with a safe and comfortable environment. Activity rooms are available to all service users along with sensory and physiotherapy rooms. Hydrotherapy services are available in the swimming pool and spa with multi-purpose rooms for structured activities.

## Wisteria Lodge, Horney Common, Nutley, East Sussex TN22 3EA

Wisteria Lodge in Nutley, East Sussex, caters for young people with physical and learning disabilities. The home offers superb purpose-built facilities with track hoisting throughout. Each single room provides en suite facilities. A spa pool is available to all service users along with sensory and physiotherapy rooms.

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RAPKYNs CARE CENTRE (Physical & Learning Disabilities), Horsham 01403 276756

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# pete's place

## The law's going to the dogs



Has anti-discrimination law had any real impact on discrimination asks

**Peter White**

**T**here's a new kind of nostalgia around, and I'm seeing it increasingly in the complaints about discrimination which people send to me.

There was a classic case the other day, when we were running a story about a guide dog owner being refused a room at two hotels in North Wales. The response was instant, and huge. It was happening all over the place, apparently.

The Guide Dogs Association confirmed that they'd dealt with almost 50 complaints in the past year. And it turns out that this is happening with assistance dogs of all types.

Canine Partners and Hearing Dogs confirmed that they were increasingly worried about the "trend". And here's the thing; several e-mailers had the view that it had got worse, not better, since the passing of anti-discrimination legislation. So, could this be true; or is it just mis-remembered, rose-coloured spectacles time? Well, for a start, we know that it's not just in this one area that we're seeing an increase in discrimination.

For instance, many of the people who contacted me about the dogs issue, added that even when they were allowed in, they were often shunted off to the quieter, darker areas of dining rooms when they went to eat. To be effective, anti-discrimination law has to be one of two things: either very tough, or very rigorously enforced. In Britain's case, they are neither. Because we're dealing with civil law here, it doesn't create precedent!

This means that each case has to be fought on its merits, regardless of what's happened in the past, and it's up to the complainant to bring the case! Most people just don't have the energy for it; and that encourages the view amongst would-be discriminators, sit tight, and nothing will happen.

The only way round that would be an energetic enforcer; it's arguable that we've never had that, but certainly not, I would argue, since the substitution of a single commission, more interested in process than prosecution, in place of the

Disability Rights Commission.

There's one other problem. Enforcing anti-discrimination by law leads to a body of rules; as far as business is concerned, a body of rules is there to be got round. The idea of providing appropriate, full-hearted, imaginative assistance goes out of the window, and is replaced by "if we do this, have we sufficiently protected our asses".

Anti-discrimination will only be discouraged (it'll never be eradicated), if laws are tough, and enforced. If not, it gives a licence for the kind of backlash they certainly saw in the States, and which we may now be seeing here!

### ed cetera



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# guestcolumn

## Putting the personal into personal care

The terms "personalisation" and "personal budgets" are much bandied around these days. Here, **Martyn Sibley**, a user of personal assistants (PAs) talks about the reality of what it has meant to him

**D**irect Payments shifted the power and also the responsibility of my care to me and away from the authorities. Prior to leaving for university I was given an assessment which dictated the budget I would be given for my own care. Previously the Local Authority (LA) would have paid an agency to carry out the support. During my university life, the process was still relatively simple because they recruited, trained, paid and generally oversaw the care scheme for the disabled students.

It has been since university and living independently, as well as working full time, that I am fully responsible as an employer. I have had to learn the art of writing a job description, advertising the role, interviewing applicants, collecting references to safeguard myself and creating a watertight contract of employment. Furthermore I then have to train my new PAs, create a rota and fit in with their own demands. There are the financial matters of monthly pay, tax/NI contributions,



Martyn Sibley (right) and his PA David Fielding

**For me this is being able to lie in on a Saturday morning, go to a football match and then stay out until 3am, after drinks and a club with my mates**

keeping the account liquid (not overspending), liability insurance, monitoring forms to show the LA how I spend the money, and any other ad hoc matters.

Before Personalisation I had care from a different person each day who would still need some level of training for my needs. The times I would receive care

outcomes focused assessment has provided support to begin swimming again. I hadn't for ten years due to perceived barriers. I now attend a local leisure centre for free with my PA, there are hoists and changing beds meaning it is barrier free. I am definitely feeling the benefits physically and emotionally. Next is hopefully assistance with an adventure holiday abroad.

If both sides are able to capacity build themselves to be personalisation ready, the benefits will be reaped for all. Disabled people will gain skills which are transferable to the workplace, they can choose how to live their life and open new doors to leisure that were once closed. Meanwhile service providers should be creative in tweaking existing services and creating whole new services to give their customers exactly what they need, want and once dreamed about.

### → Have your say

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- email us [editor@disabilitynow.org.uk](mailto:editor@disabilitynow.org.uk)
- phone us 020 7619 7323

# upclose & personal

I'm waiting for my new client to arrive at the Marple Cross Centre in Southsea, where I have a private counselling practice. We've spoken on the phone to make the arrangements, but other than her name, I know very little about her. She knows even less about me, including the fact that I'm a wheelchair-user. I'm very conscious of my "disabledness" at these moments, because I know it's probably the first thing that will register for the client when they see me.

The door opens and "Janey" (not her real name) walks through. I smile and say hello, and watch her reaction as she spots the wheelchair. She seems surprised but follows me into the counselling room, sits down and watches carefully as I manoeuvre into position in front of her. Suddenly she's sobbing and apologising for "wasting my time" with her "trivial" problems – "Look at you", she wails, "I've no right to complain!".

I don't advertise the fact that I'm a "disabled counsellor" – it's one aspect of my identity that's obvious as soon as a client meets me; unlike other things that make me who I am, I have no choice about whether I disclose it or not. But it's nearly always there, the "elephant" in the room.



## Facing out the elephant

Disabled counsellor **Libby Webber** looks at her own and other people's reactions to her in her work as a therapist

As with everything else that comes into the room, I work with it.

I can be sitting with a client, listening to their story, and I'll become aware of a hesitancy or embarrassment, and I'll

wonder if they're thinking about me and my "situation" rather than their own. It's only natural curiosity, after all. I'll ask "What happened there? You seemed to hesitate...", and sometimes they'll say "Why

Suddenly she's sobbing and apologising for 'wasting my time' with her 'trivial' problems – 'Look at you', she wails, 'I've no right to complain!'

are you in a wheelchair?". I then have to decide how to handle it. And the decision is always based on what will benefit the therapeutic process for that client.

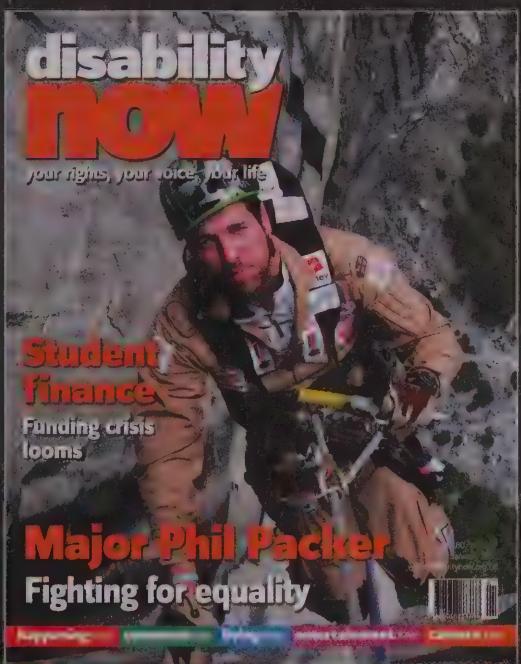
When disability enters the therapy session, it's not usually as dramatic as with Janey; her whole life revolved around caring for others, and – subconsciously – she was aghast at the idea that she might have to look after me, her counsellor, as well. I was able to let her know that I can look after myself, and was strong enough to support her too. I felt I was giving her a therapeutic gift; the freedom and opportunity to receive care and support for herself.

It doesn't always work out so well; one client disappeared after two sessions and wrote me an apologetic letter saying she didn't want to add to my problems as I surely had "quite enough to cope with already". I hadn't realised at the time that this was what was going on for her, and I regret that.

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# Lara's fashion let-down

An evening in London's trendy Knightsbridge district promised **Lara Masters** glitz, splendour and diversity. But ultimately, she says, it failed to deliver

The seeds of this extravaganza – a fashion show with models who are disabled, mature, plus-size and of different nationalities – were sown when former model Angel Sinclair joined forces with Sally Williams and set up Models of Diversity, “to promote the use of models that reflect diversity in society in terms of race, shape, age and ability.”

The culmination of this venture was celebrated on a summer evening at Knightsbridge’s Millennium Hotel, nestled amongst Fendi, Gucci and Chanel on one of London’s most exclusive streets. There was champagne, sushi and semi-‘slebs like David Van Day and apparently the “fashion elite” and some “WAGS” – but no one I recognised – although there were lots of girls with fake boobs and fake bakes dressed in not very much.

I joined the throngs of spectators of all abilities, sizes, shapes, ages and ethnicities, gathered around a catwalk – or a rectangle of masking tape on the carpet – to see ourselves “represented” by the Models of Diversity.

Forty five minutes later than scheduled, David VD introduced his wife, “beauty expert” Sue Moxley and businessman Anthony Papas to

compere the “Body Beautiful Catwalk” which was split into four shows; disabled, mature, plus-size and “Models of Nationality”.

Initially there were technical difficulties and the mics were cutting in and out so we couldn’t hear the presenters. However, the disabled show began and the names – and disabilities (!) – of each model were announced, loud and clear.

**I joined the throngs of spectators of all abilities, sizes, shapes, ages and ethnicities, gathered around a catwalk – or a rectangle of masking tape on the carpet – to see ourselves ‘represented’ by the Models of Diversity**

First on the catwalk was Riccardo Hoyte, who is deaf and won Deaf Idol 2003. He has model looks and moved well, lip-syncing, strutting and dancing to Mariah Carey.

Next, Eritrean-born Heroday Berhane, who is also deaf and extremely beautiful, showed great

poise and presence on the runway as did Kelly Knox (who was introduced as Faye Coldwell and then as Kelly Locks by the clearly unrehearsed presenters). Kelly won *Britain’s Missing Top Model* and has part of one arm missing and as she worked the rectangle strip in a corset, suspenders and heels, it was clear she’s become a proficient model.

However, the four other disabled models were less convincing. Sarah Jane Fields has cerebral palsy and uses a walking-frame but demonstrated nothing outstanding in her look or performance and Elouise Standbridge, who also has CP and was pushed along the runway by a grinning assistant in a little black dress, wore an unremarkable summer dress and sat in a standard wheelchair. We were told: “She can walk when she feels like it” and Sue remarked “didn’t she look great?” as Elouise exited. I don’t think this is the kind of commentary that Kate Moss or Naomi receive when they’re on the runway.

Then Rick Rodgers, who has Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy, a pain condition affecting his sympathetic nervous system, wheeled along the runway with a confident smile on his boyish face which was



From left to right: Riccardo Hoyte; Sarah Jane Fields; Kelly Knox; Heroday Berhane; Elouise Standbridge; Rick Rodgers and Tracey Warren

half-obscured by foppish, unstyled hair, and his loud checked jacket, bow-tie and beige slacks made him look uncool and geeky like Carlton from *The Fresh Prince*.

Lastly, Tracey Warren did her turn in a manual wheelchair as she has a cystic spinal cord tumour. Bubbly and energetic with an impressive hairdo, Tracey was also let down by her styling – a bandeau print dress with brown gladiator sandals.

In fact, all the models with mobility

aids (none of which had been customised for the show) looked at the very best "catalogue" material in cheap, mismatching getups, whereas the three walking models oozed sex-appeal in their striking clothes.

I left thinking that whilst I applaud MoD for trying to raise media awareness and funds for the workshops they run to help aspiring disabled models, positive discrimination can be counter-productive and not every disabled

person can be a model.

When breaking away from the restrictive stereotype of a model being a tall, size zero "beauty", parameters can only be re-worked if a disabled model offers something more than an able-bodied model in some way. Also, if the media and fashion industry are to take notice of disabled models, a fashion show such as tonight's must be perfectly polished and produced; anything sloppy or amateurish risks being a step backwards for disability.

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# cuba

then and now

More than 50 years ago, society photographer **Ray Bellisario** paid his first visit to Cuba. On his delayed return recently, as a disabled person he found that, while much had changed and access left a good deal to be desired, one of his most abiding memories was still in evidence

**I**t was with a degree of curiosity and trepidation that I made a belated return trip to Cuba, which I first visited early in 1958. Vivid in my memory were those awesome, rakish and immensely stylish American cars of the 50s era.

In those tumultuous years, Cuba was a troubled land. Though there then for just a few days, I was struck how the seriously mismanaged country reflected two distinct images; of wealth and privilege and of poverty and misery. Under the criminally corrupt dictatorship of President Fulgencio Batista, the rich – foreigners, mostly Americans, who filched much of the productive land and the country's industries in flagrant mafioso style – disgracefully wallowed in luxury and high living while the exploited majority laboured long hours for pitifully meagre pay and lived in overcrowded hovels. Cuba was ripe for revolution and by that time rebellion, under the leadership of brothers Fidel and Raul Castro, Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos, was well under way with major insurgent attacks advancing from the south east of the island.

Arriving in the capital Havana 52 years on, one is struck by the impression that, despite the political and cultural change brought on by the upheaval of history, time has stood still; remaining are some of the outstanding images reminiscent of those eventful days. The avenues of noble and graceful neoclassical houses still have their sentient aura but now their facades show neglect and want of maintenance with fallen plaster and



RAY BELLISARIO

only a flakey semblance of the bright peach, avocado, lilac, primrose and turquoise colours they were once so decoratively painted. Look closely and you see bullet holes pock-marking walls – evidence of the revolution's street fighting.

Still rolling and bouncing along the streets are those flashy, ostentatious Yankee cars (ah, those Chevies, Buicks, Cadillacs and Dodges of yesteryear) that their previous owners hurriedly abandoned when fleeing the island in their panic-stricken haste to avoid the

wrath of the cheated people at their hour of victory. Somehow the enterprising Cubans with their engineering skills have managed to re-fabricate spare parts to keep the old, highly chromed, garish, tail-finned, jalopies on the road.

Taking a ride in one of the old bangers along an empty suburban road, the driver suddenly stopped. He had spotted a blind man waiting to cross, he called out to the man, "it's all clear brother, you can cross now, nothing is coming". Clearly grateful for the driver's kind act, the man safely stepped out. I too was touched by such thoughtfulness, rare in any country!

Havana is catching up with the 21st century. The capital is the busy hub of the nation and is the first centre of attraction for overseas

#### Did you know?

Cubans have ration books to obtain essential foods at subsidized cost – they invariably cannot afford the prices that tourists pay to eat.



RAY BELLISARIO

## Havana

visitors; tourism is a rapidly increasing industry, though the islanders would say not fast enough for the moribund economy which the US deliberately brought upon them with the paralyzing economic embargo – punishment for Cuba's adoption of socialist policies.

My granddaughter accompanied me (her reward for successfully completing her law studies) and, wherever we ventured on our month-long excursion of the island, we were generously greeted with the warmest hospitality.

Mostly a wheelchair-user and having heard that Cuban roads and pavements are distinctly disabled-unfriendly, I chose to depend entirely on my walking aids and fortunately left my wheels at home. The chair would have been totally useless – the unrepaved roads, deep gutters, Everest kerbs and holed and broken, impassable pavements make a stroll along the street a very slow, tiring and painful exercise. Unless you're careful, you can find yourself stepping into deep water, manhole covers go missing and

pavements can be hazardous.

After a couple days of acclimatizing to the hot summer sun, adjusting to the relaxing Cuban pace and planning our itinerary, we left our Havana hotel and, with some difficulty for me, climbed aboard one of the fleet of very comfortable, modern, air-conditioned Chinese-built coaches of the smoothly operated Viazul national transport system which will take you everywhere (very much the same as the UK's National Express).

Our first destination was Cienfuegos (translates as One Hundred Fires), a three-and-a-half hour ride that meets any visitor's expectation, with fellow passengers happily singing to the Latin American CD music played by two choirmasters – otherwise known as our drivers! We were soon on the country's only motorway, though you would hardly realize it as there appeared to be no special motorway regulations, everyone used it; villagers wandered along criss-crossing at will, heavily laden donkeys were overtaken by cyclists, at roadside stalls vehicles

### Did you know?

**Fulgencio Batista, Cuba's former highly corrupt President fled the country on January 1st 1959.**

would pull up to buy fresh fruit and mango juice from local farmers' children and at junctions groups of 20 to 30 would-be travellers stood waving Cuban pesos in unsuccessful offers for a lift. As we trundled through townships the bus would stop for anyone wanting to have a coffee and sandwich. Hardly National Express!

Known as "The Pearl of the South", Cienfuegos is a clean and orderly town, a former Spanish port surrounded by sugar, tobacco and coffee plantations. The first task is to find suitable accommodation. A short taxi ride away from the bus terminal, we stop outside a sedate house bearing the white and blue plaque that indicates it is a "casa particular" (an official bed & breakfast establishment licenced by the authorities and regularly inspected to ensure high



standard). We need look no further. Invited in by the owner Myleen, we see an impeccable, spacious bedroom and a gleaming en-suite bathroom. It's ours for £10 a night with breakfast. (For another £5 per person she prepared a truly superb dinner.) With such a charming hostess, we gladly stayed three days as we explored the attractive shopping malls and vast enticing beaches of the warm Caribbean Sea.

There are plenty of shops but visitors shouldn't expect to easily find what they want to buy, shelves have little on them as supplies are very restricted due to the US-imposed trading blockade; the island's commerce and development is cruelly affected. Shopping for specific items is not simple and locals depend on word of mouth when shipments arrive; I searched for two days in 13 likely stores before finding one that had razor blades.

After an hour's journeying along the winding road through sleepy hamlets of tiny houses, we pull into the crowded terminal at Trinidad, a gorgeously picturesque, cobblestoned sugar port full of sweet, romantic influence shipped in by Spanish sailors of old – until you remember that often theirs was human cargo picked up enroute in West Africa for sale into enslavement on the plantations. But with its steep streets, it is today a tranquil idyll of picture postcard scenery, easy on the eye but hard on someone with mobility issues.

Though small, Trinidad at night buzzed with life and the sound of music from bars and clubs. It's a Cuban trait, you find it everywhere. And the town has its ample share of beautiful, bronzed people!

Arriving in Camaguey's Grand Plaza on a sun-drenched Saturday morning,

## Cienfuegos

the air was filled with the moving rhythmic beat of salsa, danced by teams of schoolchildren in a competition performance enjoyed by hundreds of strollers and shoppers. Paying guests of university professor Elena and her jovial husband Leonardo, we'd breakfasted well in their garden's cool shade as he joked loudly with us and his wife. Quite convincingly, he repeatedly told us with warm sincerity, "You are family. Our house is your house", a phrase we often heard at the casas particular. They were a lovely couple and we were treated royally. Little wonder that given such hospitality universally, we had no need to stay in expensive hotels and we got to experience much more of Cuban life.

Ours was a study tour, a venture round the whole island country in which we met for real the very human people in their simple and modest environs. We stopped off in many exquisite towns, Santa Clara, Bayamo, Santiago de Cuba with its rather claustrophobic, traffic-filled streets and narrow strips of quite unsuitable pavement to try to walk on, and to Guantanamo where my professional investigative intuition required me to check out its infamous American detention centre (in which I was profoundly unsuccessful as vast approaches to it are mined to prevent such invasion!). All had their own unique characteristics, buildings, colleges and universities, galleries, churches, museums and, most

importantly, their own individual claim to participation in the history of the Revolution of which the Cubans are so justly proud. We saw its endless glistening beaches and travelled the roads through a countryside of magnificent, lush sugar, coffee and banana plantations and miles upon miles of mango trees.

Back in Havana for the last few days, it allowed time to learn more about the capital and the history, ancient and modern, that it holds; of its exploitation by early colonialists who landed stolen people to be registered at the Customs House and to then be herded into a nearby market place in the Plaza de San Francisco where they were sold into a life of enslavement; of dictatorship and maladministration, corruption by the unscrupulous and the resulting suffering of the people. A ride in a carrozza, a traditional horse-drawn carriage, from Parque Centrale under the guidance of a trained and knowledgeable driver like our Michel is a tour well worth taking. ■

## INFORMATION

Ray and his granddaughter took an all-in package with Cubadirect – flight with Cubana, visas, Hotel Vedado for first three nights.

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# tried & tested

## Seeing the bigger picture

If you're finding it a little harder to read the phone book or can't thread a needle first go, **Ian Macrae** has been looking at a couple of small devices that may help

**M**agnification is not necessarily just for those of us with "low vision". Many people, for many different reasons, find they benefit from having something that gives their sight a bit of a boost, maybe for close or fiddly tasks or for challengingly small print.

Although there are hundreds of magnifiers about, on a basic level, these days, you're faced with two options.

At the more traditional and cheaper end of the market, there are optical magnifiers: hand-held lenses, usually made now of plastic, that may come with built-in illumination.

More expensive, but increasingly more affordable, are video magnifiers, which have come down in price since the advent of digital camera technology.

We've been looking at one of each, both relative newcomers.

First up, from Daylight, which specialises in illuminated optical lenses, is the nifty little Medicine Bottle Magnifier (see top).



Fitting easily into the palm of your hand, this is designed specifically to enable you to read the print on medicine bottle labels. It has a spring clip which grasps the bottle under the lens.

Also below the lens are two of Daylight's trademark high powered, high quality LED lamps, which means you can put a little light on the subject.

Although the field of view is fine, the magnification, at around 3x, wasn't sufficient for me with my low vision needs. However, colleagues said it did the job perfectly for them.

As I've hinted, this little magnifier clearly has the

edge on price, coming in at £14.99.

Meanwhile, at around £350, our next contender for review will make a rather larger demand on your pocket (see below). But here we have to be wary about not comparing apples with oranges.

The compact Mini from Dutch-based company Optelec looks rather like a small sat nav unit. On its back face there's a camera lens and three powerful LED lamps. The front is taken up by a 3.5 inch screen.

When powered up, it offers 5x, 7x and 11x magnification. There is also a range of viewing options including yellow print on blue, white on black, black on white and full colour.



There is also a snapshot button which is particularly useful for capturing something that's not in a good position for viewing directly, like prices on supermarket shelves.

Its main drawback is that, being hand-held, it's of little use for jobs that require the use of both hands. There is a fold-away stand, but it's of limited practical use.

The magnifier gives a good stable image when moved over a page and battery life is quite good, at around two hours of constant usage, although its performance is likely to be compromised by powering up and down.

This really is an area, then, where you pay your money and you takes your choice: cheap and cheerful optical magnifiers with fixed magnification or more expensive but more flexible video units.

# helen dolphin

## Slimming threatens transport body



**Successes:** London (top; bottom); Tyne Metro (centre)



The Government's recruitment freeze risks threatening the effectiveness of the most respected advisory groups on disability and transport

For the past three years I've served on the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC).

DPTAC advises government and industry by presenting a pan-disability view on the impacts of transport law, regulation, guidance and policy.

DPTAC is an independent body established by the Transport Act 1985 and has a statutory duty to consider any matter referred to it by transport ministers.

I believe that DPTAC has played a big role in driving forward dramatic improvements to the accessibility of trains, buses and coaches.

As a consequence, public transport in most urban areas in the UK is now much easier to use. Within the next ten years, all the main vehicles will be accessible but much still needs to be done to help people with disabilities in the way they use these services, not least improving the behaviour of staff, and simplifying the booking systems for assistance. There's also

the continued struggle for more accessible taxis, and improvements to railway stations.

However, like other non-departmental public bodies, DPTAC is under threat. At the end of the year, nine DPTAC members including me will lose their seats, because of a recruitment freeze. This will leave just ten people to carry out all the work. With so few people, can DPTAC still be effective?

**Nine DPTAC members will lose their seats. With just ten people left, can it still be effective?**

Not according to Ann Bates, who currently chairs the Rail Working Group. One of DPTAC's four working groups, it advises the Department for Transport on improving access to rail services for disabled people. It also advises the Secretary of State on exemptions from the Rail Vehicle Accessibility

Regulations and dispensations to the Stations Code of Practice, Trains and Stations Services for Disabled People.

"I firmly believe that a DPTAC with only ten members will not only be unlawful under the Transport Act but will not have the time or resources to provide the independent advice required by the Secretary of State and thus easily become unfit for purpose," she says.

This is also the view held by Tomi Jones, chair of the Road Transport Working

## With only ten members, DPTAC will not only be unlawful under the Transport Act but will lack the time and resources to offer the advice required by the Secretary of State

Group, which advises the Department for Transport on improving access to taxi, minicab, bus and coach services for disabled people.

"With most working group

chairs being stood down, DPTAC will be left with a big gap in experience. This will have dire consequences for the disabled travelling public, I fear, leaving it with a far weaker voice in government."

In November 2008, a review of DPTAC was conducted. It highlighted the great value that DPTAC has provided to parliament, the civil service and industry in giving independent advice that is almost impossible to obtain elsewhere.

It also concluded that no other organisation was able

to take on DPTAC's work, nor could the voluntary sector easily fill the gap in expertise that would be created were we abolished.

Although DPTAC has not been abolished, the new committee of just ten members will have to battle hard to get its voice heard. Sadly, I believe this will lead to a weakening of disability rights within the transport services.

I therefore hope the Government sees sense and reinstates DPTAC to, at the very least, its lawful number of members.

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# Oscar shines on at Diamond League



Oscar Pistorius (*pictured left*) moved a step closer to competing at the Commonwealth Games against non-disabled athletes after setting a new 400m world record at the Diamond League event at Crystal Palace.

The South African sprinter set his fastest mark in a non-disabled race on the first day of the event, finishing seventh in a time of 46.93.

On day two, in a disability race, Pistorius dominated the field in a time of 47.04, four and a half seconds ahead of Great Britain's Ian Jones, and still inside the previous world best of 47.49 he set on his way to winning Paralympic gold inside the Bird's Nest stadium in Beijing in 2008.

However the faster time will not stand, as the non-disabled race was not sanctioned by the International Paralympic Committee, meaning the record cannot be ratified.

Pistorius said: "I'm super happy. After yesterday's race, it was really difficult today. I'm happy to have run decent times back to back. Being in London is unbelievable."

"We are going to have to get used to these conditions for London 2012 but the crowds here are amazing. Today I went out hard, maybe a bit too ballsy, but

yesterday I started too slow. I'm happier with today's race. It's great to have these Paralympics events at the London Grand Prix."

South Africa Athletics have set a mark of 45.95 for Pistorius to meet to qualify to run against non-disabled athletes at this autumn's Commonwealth Games in Delhi, just 0.07 seconds short of his personal best of 46.02 – another unrated time set against non-disabled opponents.

As the Commonwealth Games has no minimum qualifying standards, the 23-year-old will still be eligible to compete should his federation choose to include him in their squad when it is announced on 25 August.

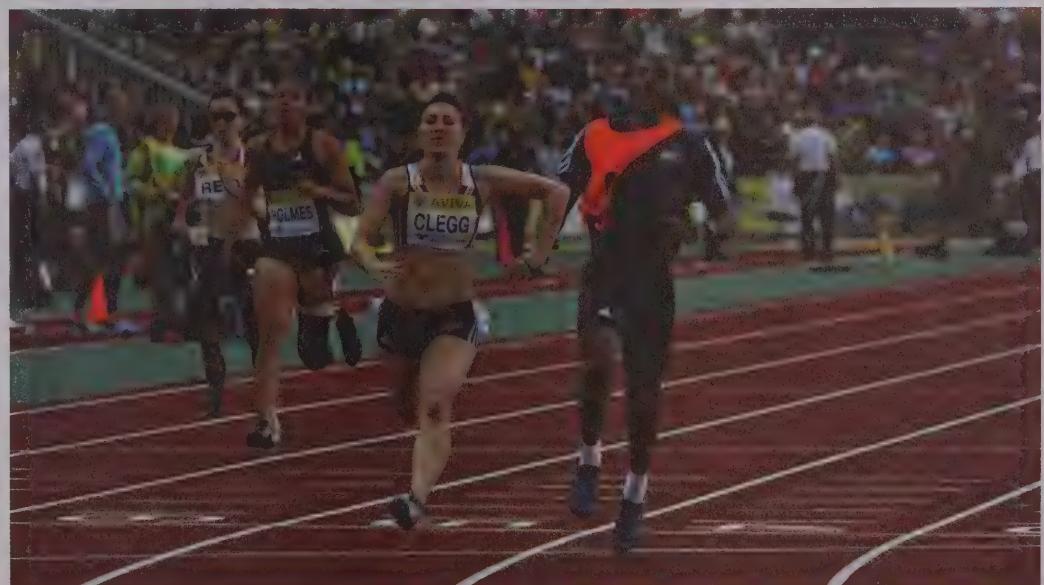
Also featuring at the Diamond League event was double Paralympic gold medalist David Weir, who lined up in an impressive T54 1500m field that also featured Switzerland's Marcel Hug, who finished ahead of Weir at the Paralympic World Cup over both 800m and 1500m earlier this year.

World record holder Weir had to settle for silver again with Hug taking gold. In front of an enthusiastic home crowd, Weir looked well placed for a sprint finish as he tracked Hug in the closing stages.

However, Hug's wide final line around the top



MARK DAVIDSON



MARK DAVIDSON

**Top:** Marcel Hug crosses the line ahead of David Weir; **above:** Libby Clegg, with guide runner, takes gold

bend meant Weir could not use the slipstream release to overtake, and was forced to finish second in a time of 3:15.09, with Hug crossing in 3:14.68. Richard Coleman of Australia finished third in 3:20.64, with Brian Alldis

finishing fifth.

Beijing Paralympic silver medallist Libby Clegg took gold in a combined T12/T44 classification race over 100m, fending off a strong challenge from Stefanie Reid who is fresh from a T44 world long jump

record set at last week's McCain Jumpsfest event.

As it was, Clegg had the strength to take victory by almost a second in 12.72, with Reid taking third in 13.69 behind American April Holmes who took silver in 14.09.

# entertainmentnow

If you've ever been to the Old Town part of Edinburgh you will know how many cobbles there are. As a wheelchair-user reviewing shows all day every day, these cobbles begin to tire me out and my wheels don't appreciate them either! But it's the biggest festival in the world and my favourite time of the year.

Most of the 369 venues that the Fringe uses are listed buildings. These are hard to adapt but they do try very hard. Ninety per cent are accessible in some way, even if it's a ten minute diversion to use four different lifts instead of climbing the five steps everyone else has to manage. Fringe staff try really hard to meet the needs of disabled customers.

I am involved with equality training for all Fringe staff. I was disappointed at the level of turnout at these sessions but I've not run into any serious access problems so far. All disabled customers get a free ticket for their personal assistant which I think is great.

Upsetting at times but realistic, *Expectations* (pictured above right) at the Pleasance Dome was one of the tougher shows I



© JENNIE SMITH

## Fringe benefits: Edinburgh on wheels

Going the extra Royal Mile, Josh Hepple braves the cobbles to take in a selection of shows from this year's Edinburgh Fringe for *Disability Now*

took in. It tells the very harsh truth about how challenging it can be to have a disabled child. Performed in English and Swedish, this excellent play based on the experiences of two of the actors was a very realistic depiction of the problems faced by parents of disabled children: their anger, disappointment and struggle to accept.

It was distressing to see the doctor in the hospital call the baby "fascinating", as he was more interested in the genetic mutation rather than trying to make this very ill baby better. My parents experienced something very close to this when I stopped breathing three days after I was born.

It raises questions such as: is a disabled child's life as valuable as a non-disabled child's? Is it worth the extra care needed from the parents? Do medical professionals or social services do enough to support disabled children's parents? It's very emotional and may be distressing for parents of disabled children to watch but my family and I related very easily to *Expectations*.

Stand-up comedy has never been my favourite kind of Fringe show, but as Adam Hills (*opposite page left*) is disabled I thought I would



FOCALPOINT OPTICS

see if *Mess Around* could change my view. To rely mainly on improvisation for the better part of an hour is not an easy thing to do, but Adam pulled it off well. The main theme was stereotypes, and in the audience Adam discovered an Australian who lost his wedding ring "in the surf" and a Dutchman with a narrow beard.

I wanted to hear a bit more about Adam's prosthetic leg but at the same time I was glad that his whole show was not based on his impairment and understand that his disability does not define him as a person. This show didn't change my opinion of stand-up, but from the audience reaction, *Mess*

*Around* was a hit.

In *(Bye)Polar* at The Space James is a troubled teenager struggling with bipolar disorder. James cuts himself off from the world, spending much of his time isolated in his room whilst he struggles to cope with his debilitating and unpredictable manic and depressive episodes. It's evident that his father finds it incredibly difficult to come to terms with his son's condition.

The decision to have James wear a hospital gown throughout the play allowed the audience to feel how vulnerable James is and how his life has become "medicalised".

The play illustrated extremely successfully the



at this year's Fringe.

*Smiler* at the Gilded Balloon is about the relationship between the actor Richard Fry (pictured left) and his friend with serious head injuries. As someone with a disability who requires a substantial level of support, I could relate to *Smiler* but felt uncomfortable with the fuzzy overlap between friendship and assistance. One of the hardest things for me as a young disabled man is working out the boundaries I have to set with my personal assistants. I've been hurt in the past by misinterpreting signals as true friendship, whereas in fact to the people concerned, they were just doing a job.

This is the third play I have seen in this year's Fringe which deals directly with disability. Although they have all been unrelentingly miserable and depressing, it's a sign that disability is becoming more visible, which can only be a good thing. My hope is that next year there may be a disability show with a happy ending. If I can't find one, maybe I'll just have to write it myself!

### → Up-to-the-minute listings

For all the latest arts listings visit  
[www.disabilitynow.org.uk/entertainment/arts](http://www.disabilitynow.org.uk/entertainment/arts)



# What will government cuts mean for you?

Public services, including social care and benefits for disabled people like Disability Living Allowance and Incapacity Benefit, are facing the hardest cuts in decades as the Government tries to balance the books.

But real people's lives will be affected.

Helen from Buckinghamshire says:

"I am really worried that I will be forced back to work and my health will suffer. You can't see pain or fatigue, so how am I supposed to prove these things at a medical assessment or explain what a problem they are?"

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# webwatch

## Pick of the blogs

Physically disabled journalist and blogger **Sarah Ismail** wouldn't be without the internet for anything. Here she highlights some of her favourite disability blogs

**O**ver the years, I've learnt that the Web gives all disabled people a clear voice – something that many of us don't have in offline life – as well as access to a lot of useful, interesting information that otherwise we'd have no way of accessing.

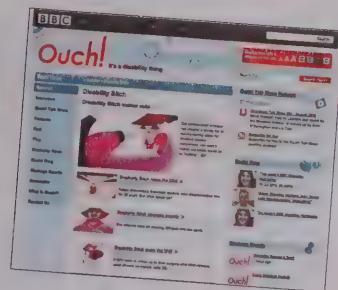
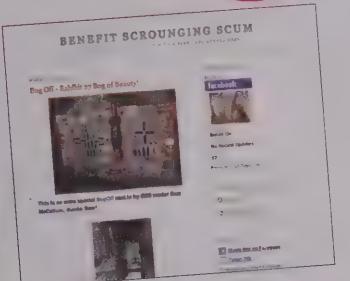
I discovered blogs about three years ago, and since then, there's been no looking back. I started editing my personal blog, Same Difference, ([samedifference1.com](http://samedifference1.com)) in summer 2007. There I publish all kinds of useful information for disabled people and their families and friends. I also comment on disability representation on TV, in movies, in books and on stage, celebrate progress in disability rights and rant about disability wrongs.

Since I started blogging and reading disability blogs, I've been lucky enough to "meet" other disabled bloggers with all sorts of



disabilities – some of which I'd never otherwise have heard of. One of my favourites is the brilliant BendyGirl, who blogs at Benefit Scrounging Scum ([benefitscroungingscum.blogspot.com](http://benefitscroungingscum.blogspot.com)) about, in her own words, "life in a broken bureaucracy with a bendy and borked body."

There's also a blogger called The Goldfish who, as well as writing her Diary ([blobolobolob.blogspot.com](http://blobolobolob.blogspot.com)), runs an annual blogging event called Blogging Against Disablism Day. Every year on 1 May, disabled bloggers (and bloggers who care about disability) worldwide make a special effort to publish a post about some form of disablism. The Goldfish then links to all of these at her site. I've



participated since 2008. I love the idea of the day and look forward to it each year.

Then there's Crippen, the disabled cartoonist. I visit his website, ([crippencartoons.co.uk](http://crippencartoons.co.uk)) whenever I need a smile. And, of course, no list of disability websites would be complete without the BBC's Ouch! ([bbc.co.uk/ouch.](http://bbc.co.uk/ouch/)) Ouch! includes a blog, a regularly updated disability news page which links to disability news stories from newspapers throughout the UK, and a

messageboard. They are also the publishers of the one and only Disability Bitch ([bbc.co.uk/ouch/opinion/b1tch](http://bbc.co.uk/ouch/opinion/b1tch)) and the hilariously brilliant monthly column, Disability Is Everywhere.

I've also "met" online some parents and family members of disabled people who blog and campaign for disability rights in all areas. Nicky Clark, whose daughters are both disabled, is campaigning to get more disabled actors and actresses on TV, particularly in roles of disabled characters. She runs the appropriately titled Don't Play Me, Pay Me campaign. ([dontplaymepayme.com](http://dontplaymepayme.com))

Then there's the one and only Sharon Smith, who had a public confrontation with Frankie Boyle after she heard him making negative comments about people with Down's Syndrome, her five-year-old daughter's disability, during a show in April this year. This inspired her blog, I Live For Glitter, ([k1tt3ns.blogspot.com](http://k1tt3ns.blogspot.com)) and made her an overnight media sensation.

### → Have your say

- write to us Disability Now, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW
- email us [editor@disabilitynow.org.uk](mailto:editor@disabilitynow.org.uk)
- phone us 020 7619 7323

# work life



KELLY MULLAN

## Banging his own drum

**Ahmet Faruk Vural** is finding out what his right arm's for at his job in a Walthamstow pub. Although nowadays he's known as a "Bar Associate"

I've been working at The Drum since September 2009. Before I worked here I worked for the company which does the catering for Wembley and the Emirates Stadium.

I'd been drinking in The Drum for a few months and I decided to ask the manager for a job. I filled in an application form and the next day he asked me if I could start working in the kitchen at six o'clock the next morning.

I worked there for three months helping the chef by doing things like putting

**I normally pull pints with my right arm to give it a bit of exercise**

meat under the grill and loading up the dishwasher with dirty plates. Then they decided to move me out of the kitchen and I started collecting glasses and now I work behind the bar.

I'm a Bar Associate which involves serving drinks and food. I also set the tables and clean them when people have finished eating.

Sometimes I work in the

evening and at other times during the day.

It's a Wetherspoon pub but it's different to most of the others. It's pretty small, like a friendly local.

It's fun working here and I love working with the regulars and other customers who pop in for a quick drink or meal.

Sometimes I can't carry

### AHMET FARUK VURAL: CAREER PATH

- 2001 – Left Islington Green School and went to train youth players at Arsenal
- 2002 – Worked as a

plates and glasses when I'm in pain because of my right arm. But that only happens once in a blue moon and I normally pull pints with my right arm to give it a bit of exercise.

The other staff here are great and if I have a lot of things to carry they will carry drinks from one end of the bar to the other for me.

The regulars know me and help me out by coming to the area of the bar where I am so I don't have to carry their drinks as far.

The regulars do take the mickey out of my disability but not in a serious way. They call me "wobbles" but I take the mickey out of them back and laugh with them because I know that I wobble a lot when I carry things.

My plan is to stay in The Drum and work my way up to become a manager.

I advise other disabled people thinking of working in a pub not to be scared of doing so. You'll meet new people and colleagues who will help you out if you need it.

- Ahmet Faruk Vural was talking to Sunil Peck.

- hairdresser
- 2002 – Went to work at a catering company
- 2009 – Started work at The Drum

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**DN DEADLINE** October 2010 published 28 September. Classified deadlines: Booking: 6 September. Copy: 8 September



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# backlash



## Hitting the big three-oh

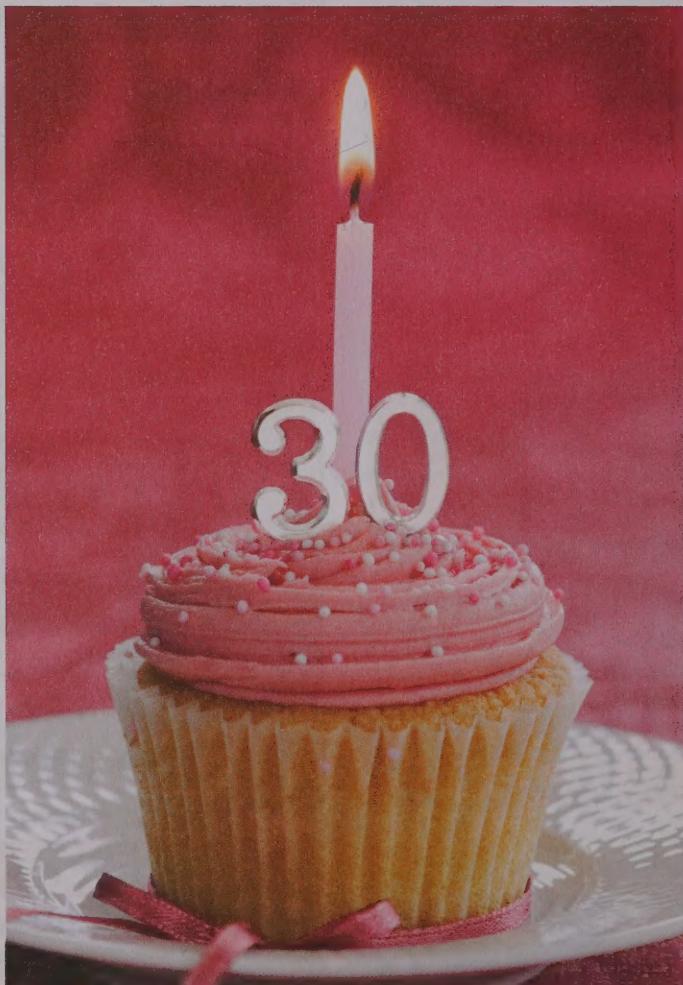
Conscious and sober once again, **Paul Carter** reflects on a milestone birthday

**W**ell, somehow, I made it. Since I last put arms to keys for this column, I've been battling through a landmark moment in my life, and simultaneously mourning the premature demise of my youth. As hard it may be to believe, I was recently forced to bid farewell to my twenties and step – or more accurately, stagger and stumble while shouting at strangers – out of my twenties and into proper grown-upness. Me! An adult!

The gloom surrounding turning 30 had followed me around in the previous week like some sort of angry sidekick, gleefully kicking me in the back of the brain if I stopped thinking about it for more than 30 seconds. See? I subconsciously said 30.

He's still there, the git.

Needless to say, I couldn't just sit back and pass into nolonger-a-young-personhood without having some form of celebration. Or wake, as it felt like beforehand. This meant I could distract myself from the actual horror of the



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occasion by giving myself something equally stressful to fret over. My brain works in peculiar ways. Also, it meant the promise of copious amounts of alcohol.

The thing that caused the most stress once the day actually came around was the moment I realised that

there would in fact be quite a few different circles of friends meeting each other for the first time. For quite a few of the people who were coming, this would be the first time they've ever been in a room with so many disabled people.

Now while I obviously

don't associate with anyone who would ever be deliberately offensive, there's always that fear in the back of your mind that someone is going to drop some monumental faux pas or do something utterly inappropriate.

This was shown in the cards I got – several of my close friends got me cards that related to or made light of my height or lack of legs, which, incidentally, I found extremely funny. But it did get me thinking how I'm happy with my friends saying stuff to me that I'd likely bite the ankles off a stranger for saying.

As it turned out, everything went incredibly smoothly, and seemingly a good time was had by all. I say seemingly, because I only actually remember the first hour and have relied on the testimony of others to piece together some form of memory of the rest of the evening. True to form, that person who was probably going to do something hideously embarrassing was probably me. How very mature. Here's to adulthood.

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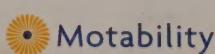


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